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Klaus MALETTKE, *Les relations entre la France et le Saint-Empire au XVII^e siècle*, Paris (Honoré Champion) 2001, 747 p. (Bibliothèque d'histoire moderne et contemporaine, 5).

The appearance of Klaus Malettke's thoughtful and scholarly work is a major event for those interested in the study of international relations. Malettke takes one of the most important topics in bilateral relations, that between France and what would subsequently be termed Germany, and takes it forward by a determined methodological and empirical engagement with the problem of moving beyond a nationalist perspective and, instead, understanding both points of view. The nearest comparison is that to Paul Kennedy's study on Anglo-German relations in the late nineteenth century, although Malettke's determined engagement is taken further by his decision to write his account in French.

After two thematic chapters, the first on the Empire's political structures and the second on French views of the Empire, the organisation is chronological. This enables Malettke to demonstrate the flaw in imagining that there was an inherent antagonism between France and the Empire. Instead, a far more complex account emerges. This was for a variety of reasons, ranging from the geopolitical strategic considerations beloved by realist theorists to those that focus on the cultural dimensions of political assumptions. In the first case, it is necessary for those studying both ›sides‹ to appreciate their range of commitments and anxieties. Thus, for Louis XIII and Louis XIV, relations with the Empire were generally subordinate to those with the Spanish Habsburgs. It required the destruction or overawing the grip that the latter held on the Burgundian inheritance before the Austrian Habsburgs could play a greater role in French concerns. The issue of multiple commitments, and their often complex interaction was even more the case for Austria and for the North German rulers. The need to consider relations with the Ottomans and with Baltic rulers played a major role. From Vienna and Prague, as from Dresden, Berlin and Regensburg, France was distant. The proximity felt in the Rhineland was notably absent.

To turn to cultures, the dynastic theme was generally one of competition for prominence, prestige and the prizes of marital competition. The religious dimension was more complex. Within France, there were powerful circles that argued in favour of confessional policies, and, in addition, assumptions about the need to consider the interests of the Church resonated widely. The same was the case in the Imperial court. Malettke also skilfully shows how French attitudes towards the Imperial constitution contributed to their political strategy. Richelieu saw the Empire as an aristocratic state with sovereignty resting in the individual states united in the Imperial Diet. Protecting this constitution offered France security, a situation analogous to that of Russia towards Sweden during the eighteenth-century Swedish Age of Liberty and, more sinisterly, towards Poland. Mazarin shared these assumptions, but Louis XIV's failure to sustain the League of the Rhine suggested that he lacked an appreciation of the value to France of this constitution, and the related politics. The rallying of German support to Leopold I in the 1670s and, even more, 1680s, discussed by Malettke, was a consequence, and this gravely weakened Louis, affecting his options in the 1690s and 1700s. The *réunions* strengthened this process, and showed the instability of hegemony, or, more specifically, how the consequences and manifestations of French hegemony undermined its basis. This excellent work casts important light on its specific subject, but also on the contours and context of early-modern international relations. It deserves widespread attention.

Jeremy BLACK, Exeter